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SUBJECT: LESOTHO'S PRIME MINISTER-ELECT SPEAKS OUT ON VICTORY, AGOA, MCC, AND MEDIA

REF: Maseru 77 and Previous

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11. SUMMARY: On February 21, 2007, a victorious and magnanimous Prime Minister-elect Mosisili convened a standing room only press conference to discuss the LCD's election win, alleged abuse of Lesotho's "Mixed Member Proportional" parliamentary system, the MCC, AGOA, and the closure of a popular opposition radio station. After a rough and tumble campaign season, the sometimes sharp-tongued Mosisili has returned to his pre-election statesmanlike demeanor. Dismissing criticism of election procedures and the possibility that audits might call into question the poll's results, PM Mosisili defended LCD actions and stated that the election results accurately reflected the will of the Basotho people. The coming weeks will be critical in determining the population's acceptance of Lesotho's 2007 National Assembly election results. END SUMMARY.

The Winner's Election Assessment

12. In a very calm, statesmanlike address, Mosisili thanked all those who had helped his Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) achieve its election victory. He also thanked diplomatic missions (with special emphasis on South Africa) for their observation and electoral assistance efforts. He emphasized that the LCD was "bruised" by the elections, due to the fact that more seats had gone to opposition parties than ever before. Mosisili expressed astonishment that urban constituencies had defected to the opposition while rural areas had stuck with the LCD, stating that his party has brought great services to Lesotho's cities and lagged behind in the countryside. Citing high unemployment in rural areas, he concluded that these voters supported him solely "on faith". He also dismissed suggestions that a post-election audit might call into question the poll's results, but somewhat grudgingly accepted the merit of conducting such an audit.

13. Several observer missions vocally criticized Lesotho's main parties for subverting the "Mixed Member Proportional" (MMP) parliamentary system by not appearing on the party list, instead forging alliances with smaller parties to serve as their "surrogates". Under Lesotho's MMP system, 80 parliamentary seats are chosen directly by constituencies, while the remaining 40 are doled out among political parties using a formula which favors parties not chosen for the first 80 seats. By not standing for election under their own names on the party list, large parties such as the LCD lend a great deal of support to their "surrogates" who are favored by the MMP mechanism. (NOTE: This tactic paid off for the LCD, who's "surrogate", the National Independence Party, gained more than half of the 40 non-constituency seats. END NOTE.) In the press conference,

Mosisili dismissed this criticism, stating that political parties, like individuals, cannot be denied the right to free association.

MCC and AGOA

14. Responding to questions concerning Lesotho's economy, PM Mosisili stated that the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) was poised to give Lesotho's economic development a shot in the arm. He stated that a compact which would be worth approximately two billion Maluti (\$350 million) would be signed "by mid-year". Regarding the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), PM Mosisili noted that Lesotho must diversify beyond the "fragile textile industry" in order to take advantage of the opportunities offered by this Presidentially-extended legislation.

Temporary Closure of Harvest FM

15. On the afternoon of February 20, Harvest FM, a broadcaster of politically-oriented radio call-in shows focused on complaints against the election process and the ruling party, was shut down on orders of the Ministry of Communications. Within 24 hours, the station was back on the air broadcasting religious programs. When asked about the situation, Mosisili first cited his party's strong record on supporting free expression. He then stated it would be irresponsible for the government to allow any radio station to promote anti-government violence on air. He also stated that the station had allowed its license to expire, and that its owner, a South African citizen, had not received a residency or work permit and had been deported. (NOTE: The allegations that the station promoted violence and that its license had expired have been refuted by station representatives. END NOTE.)

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To The Victor Go The Foils

16. COMMENT: While FM Mosisili clearly appears pleased with his party's election win, the LCD is not out of the woods yet. As he noted during the press conference, there is no culture in Lesotho of a defeated candidate calling the victor and offering congratulations. Parties have announced that the opposition ABC and BNP parties will hold a joint rally on Sunday at which a strike may be called on the basis of claimed election irregularities. Of note, PM Mosisili is moving forward his swearing-in ceremony tomorrow (February 23) - guaranteeing a smaller and more hastily arranged event than his last grand swearing-in ceremony in 2002. While the temporary closure of Harvest FM was intended to tamp down the opposition's vociferous rhetoric, it could serve as a rallying point for a frustrated opposition. The coming weeks will be critical in determining the population's acceptance of Lesotho's 2007 National Assembly election results. END COMMENT.
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